

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Office of the Administrator
Washington, DC 20546-0001



February 18, 2003

Admiral Hal Gehman, USN (Ret)
Chairman
Columbia Accident Investigation Board
16850 Saturn Lane
Houston, Texas 77058

Dear Admiral Gehman,

Thank you for your comments on the charter changes proposed last week. Pursuant to your request, I have made further changes to the charter derived from our collective efforts to consult with Members of Congress. The enclosed charter reflects all revisions to this date.

The revised charter also reflects the appointments of Roger Tetrault and Sheila Widnall as members of the Board. You have advised that you are considering a recommendation to me for another appointment. In accord with our discussions, I am prepared to make such appointments you feel would contribute to the Board's work.


I am also in receipt of a copy of a letter addressed to you from NASA's Inspector General, Robert Cobb, on February 14, 2003, asking you to acknowledge your independence in certain respects. Please feel free to advise of any aspects of your charge you feel needs particular further emphasis. Of particular note relative to the Inspector General's views, you are charged in the charter to "obtain and analyze whatever facts, evidence, and opinions it (the Board) considers relevant" to "determine the facts, as well as the actual or probable causes of the Shuttle mishap... and recommend preventative and other actions to preclude recurrence of a similar mishap."

These charter provisions and others clearly demonstrate that your Board can and must act independently. Your Board is entitled to receive any information that NASA has. If there is any resistance, please let me know and we will assure cooperation. It is within your charter to determine causes, including whether NASA budget or management or any other factors created an environment which caused or contributed to the cause of this accident.

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For these and other factors we have discussed several times over the past two weeks, I find the Inspector General's views and advice to be completely consistent with our mutual understanding of the Board's responsibility and conduct of operations for this important investigation.

Cordially,


Sean O'Keefe
Administrator